QNB | FIFA WORLD CUP Qatar2022
الداعم الرسمي لكأس العالم FIFA 2022™ في الشرق الأوسط وإفريقيا
Official Middle East and Africa Supporter of the FIFA World Cup 2022™
Dream Bigger
qnb.com

Tuesday, November 29, 2022
Jumada I 5, 1444 AH
GULF TIMES
SPORT



Qatar to play for pride as 2022 World Cup journey ends today

'I THINK THAT WE HAVE SELF CONFIDENCE AND WE WILL TRY TO COMPETE AND MAKE OUR FANS PROUD'



Qatar's Almoez Ali and coach Felix Sanchez (left) during the press conference at the Qatar National Convention Centre in Doha yesterday. *(Reuters)*

By Rizwan Rehmat
Doha

Asian champions Qatar will be playing for pride when they take on Netherlands in their last Group A match on day nine of the FIFA World Cup 2022.

In the first two matches last week, Qatar lost to Ecuador and Senegal. Qatar, the side that won the 2019 Asian Cup in the UAE under coach Felix Sanchez, scored only one goal in the two matches.

With nothing at stake but pride, coach Sanchez yesterday said they will be playing to make their fans 'proud' at Al Bayt Stadium today.

"Our objective is to be competitive (against the Netherlands). We won't be able to qualify for the next stage or advance. We would have loved to be in a position to advance but it is not to be," Sanchez said at a pre-match news conference yesterday.

"We will give our best against Netherlands. We will try to enjoy being here at the top level. I think that we have self confidence and we will try to compete and make our fans proud," the 46-year-old Spaniard added.

"The players I have, they are a demanding lot. They push themselves. I think we should be happy about the efforts that have been made all this while," he said.

"When you play a team like Netherlands you don't need any motivation (to do well).

"It is a team with high calibre and we are not concerned about their ranking. We are fully focused on our next match," Sanchez said.

"Netherlands have achieved great results over the years at World Cup events. Usually they finish among the top teams," he said.

> **We should give credit to our players for their achievements over the years. They became Asian champions, they went far in the FIFA Arab Cup last year and they reached the semi-finals at the CONCACAF Gold Cup in the US (in 2021). We are playing in a FIFA World Cup. It's still not over. There's a game to be played. Once this is over, there will be another one to plan for. I am sure the Qatar players will keep fighting.**
> **— Felix Sanchez**

"Regarding our journey here, we have faced top African and South American teams like Senegal and Ecuador. They are some of the best teams in their region. We are aware of the reality that we had a demanding group.

"Yes, I would have preferred to have been in a better position but this international sport for you. We have a player base of just 6,000 (registered individuals).

"This team has achieved great results in the last few years. We may have lagged behind here but we do hard work daily. We will keep doing it. This is the only way we can close the gap against top teams in this competition," Sanchez explained.

Sanchez said he doesn't feel let down by poor results in the first two matches.

"I think I have said this a few times that we have to take into consideration that we built our team from a small population. We are at our first World Cup. I don't feel embarrassed. These players got good results in the past. Only a few teams can be at a World Cup," Sanchez said.

"We didn't get the results we expected but this is part of a process that we are following. Bigger population provides with bigger potential to build stronger teams. Hopefully the team can do better (in the future)," he added.

Sanchez said every competition Qatar takes part in gives way to a new cycle of planning and preparation for the national team.

"We won the Asian Cup in 2019 and that was the end of one phase at that time. That was the end of a cycle. Every competition is a cycle. We are closing a chapter now. The country is focused on preparing for a new competition and to get behind a new era. We want to play our best football," Sanchez said.

"If I go back in time? It's easy to talk about things after it's over. I think we have prepared in the best possible way, but everything has to be considered in perspective, we have been working with this group for a long time. Sometimes things don't go the way you want them to.

"There was no other preparation possible. Sometimes things don't work out. Things happen for a reason," Sanchez said philosophically.

"I am very proud to represent Qatar. I am only thinking about the next match. It's an honour to be playing this match tomorrow," he said.

Qatar's premier striker Almoez Ali told reporters yesterday: "As a player, I wanted Qatari fans to be proud of us but we didn't win. We will try to play our best. Netherlands is a great team. We have learned a lot and hopefully we will qualify for the next World Cup. Hopefully we can leave the tournament with a positive result."

Netherlands coach Louis Van Gaal yesterday said he will be keeping an eye on the other match of the day involving Ecuador and Senegal. Netherlands and Senegal have 4 points each while Senegal have 3 as they head into the last round of matches today.

Van Gaal admitted a flurry of goals would be desirable to make sure Netherlands top Group A.

"I think it's straightforward," Van Gaal said when asked if he would be interested in the result between Senegal and Ecuador.

"Of course I will keep tabs on the other game and I will be informed," the 71-year-old Dutchman said.

"But the fact of the matter is, if you want to become world champion you have to be capable of beating everyone," the former Manchester United manager Van Gaal added.

"The countries you might not expect to progress are progressing, or at least making it very difficult for other teams to progress."



Netherlands' coach Louis Van Gaal (left) and Netherlands' midfielder Frenkie De Jong attend a press conference in Doha yesterday. Hosts Qatar take on the Netherlands today. *(AFP)*

Fact Box

Netherlands vs Qatar

When: Today, 6pm
Where: Al Bayt Stadium, Al Khor
Capacity: 68,895

Key stats:

- Netherlands need a win or a draw to qualify to the last 16 for the 11th time regardless of the result between Senegal and Ecuador.
- If Netherlands lose they will qualify directly to the second round if Ecuador beat Senegal, but if Senegal win the goal difference or fairplay tiebreaker will decide second place in the group.
- Netherlands never won the title but were runners-up three times in 1974, 1978 and 2010.
- Qatar were the first team to be eliminated from the finals, and it was only the second time that a host country exited the tournament in the first round after South Africa in 2010.
- Qatar will try to avoid being the first host country to fail to win a game in the finals.
- Mohamed Muntari made history when he scored Qatar's first World Cup goal in the 3-1 defeat by Senegal.

Previous meetings: This will be the first meeting between the sides.

www.srfcbio.com

INTRODUCING A REVOLUTIONARY SURFACE DISINFECTANT WITH 90 DAYS PROTECTION!!

SRFC BIO INC
NEXT LEVEL PROTECTION

Kills **99.9%** of germs including sars covid virus.

Up to **90** days protection with one application.

No harsh chemicals, non-sticky, odourless.

For use in homes, offices, gyms, stadia, aircraft etc.

MADE IN USA



For further enquiries, please contact:
Email: horeca@novuswll.com | Tel: +974 44151525

SPORT

FIFA WORLD CUP Qatar2022

QATAR

GETTING READY



FROM LEFT: Qatar's Pedro Miguel, Hassan al-Haydos and Abdelkarim Hassan during training at Aspire Academy in Doha yesterday, on the eve of their Group A match against the Netherlands. *(Reuters)*





Qatar's forwards Akram Afif and Almoez Ali (right) take part in a training session at the Aspire Zone training site yesterday. *(AFP)*

Match Report

Cameroon fight back to draw World Cup thriller with Serbia

Substitute Vincent Aboubakar and Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting snatched a draw for Cameroon with two quick-fire strikes

AFP
Doha

Cameroon kept their hopes of making the last 16 of the World Cup alive yesterday after fighting back from two goals down to draw a thrilling Group G encounter with Serbia 3-3.

Rigobert Song's team looked almost dead and buried after goals from Strahinja Pavlovic, Sergej Milinkovic-Savic and Aleksandar Mitrovic gave Serbia a 3-1 lead early in the second half.

But substitute Vincent Aboubakar and Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting snatched a draw with two quick-fire strikes just after the hour mark to leave both Cameroon and Serbia on a single point, two behind group leaders Brazil and Switzerland.

Had they lost, Cameroon would have been relying on the Swiss beating Brazil in order to not be eliminated with a game to spare, but instead the west Africans still have a chance of getting out of the group stage for the first time since 1990.

Cameroon have a tough task ahead as they play Brazil in their final match, which according to reports they will play without first-choice goalkeeper Andre Onana who was dropped from the matchday squad just hours before kick-off following an unspecified disciplinary issue.

Mitrovic was almost invisible in Serbia's defeat to Brazil but here he was involved from kick-off, the Fulham forward unlucky not to give Serbia the lead in the 11th minute when he crashed a shot off the post from a tight angle following a neat exchange of passes with Dusan Tadic.

But Mitrovic only had himself to blame for not opening the scoring six minutes later, shanking an awful first-time finish wide when, after a mix up in the Cameroon defence, the ball dropped at his feet with only Onana's replacement Devis Epassy to beat.

And Castelletto punished the Serbs for Mitrovic's miss in the 29th minute with the simplest of finishes after ghosting in at the back post to meet Nicolas Nkoulou's flick-on at a corner.

Pierre Kunde then passed up a golden opportunity to double Cameroon's lead in the 43rd minute when he first shot straight at goalkeeper Vanja Milinkovic-Savic and then smashed the rebound wide.

It was Cameroon's turn to be undone at a set-piece as the half crept into first-half stoppage time when Pavlovic brilliantly headed home Dusan Tadic's floated free-kick.

The Serbs' tails were up and Sergej Milinkovic-Savic flipped the match on its head two minutes later with a superb left-footed finish after Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa sloppily gave the ball away just outside his own penalty area.

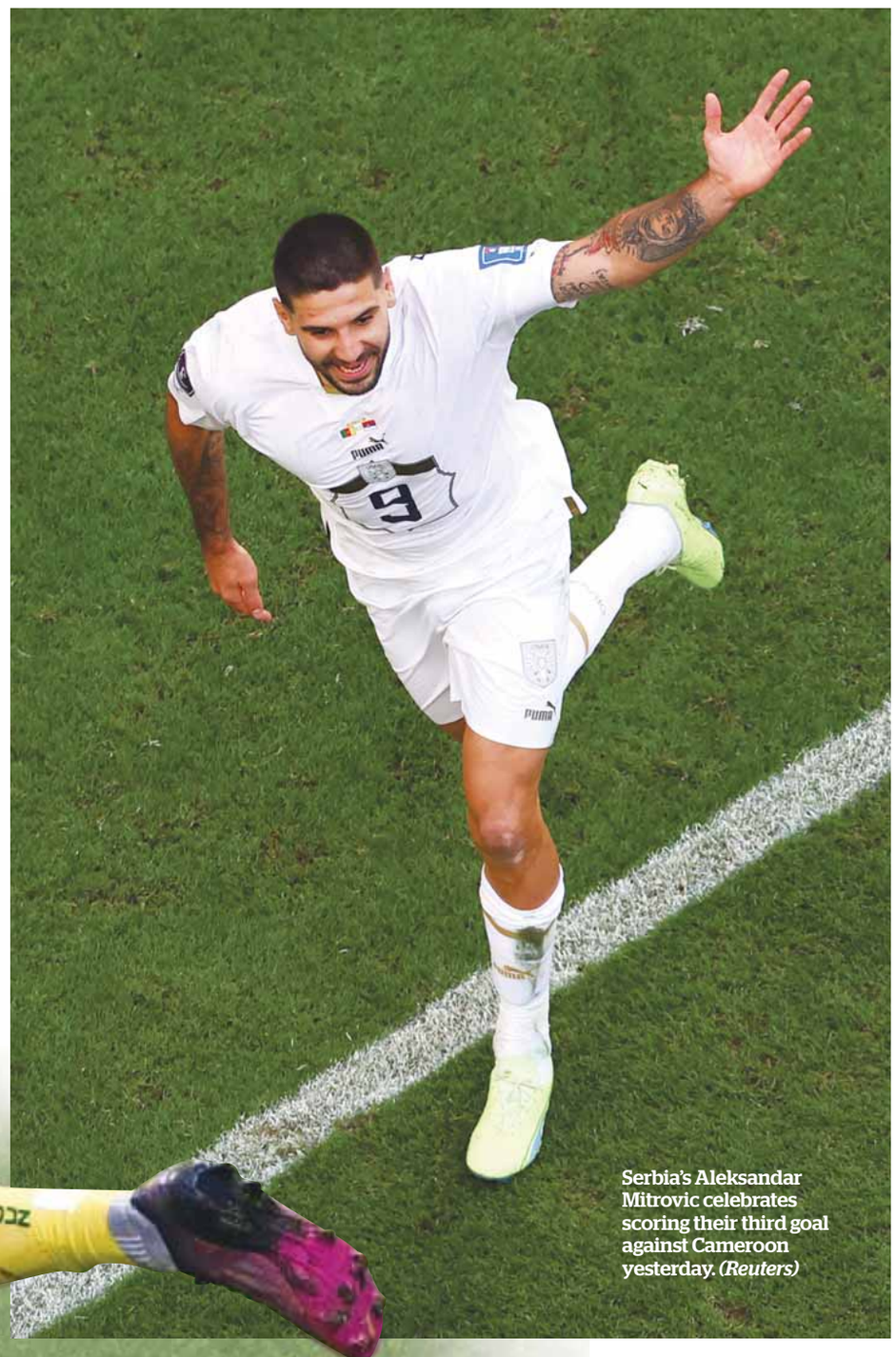
Mitrovic finally had the goal his strong display deserved seven minutes after the break, tapping in Andrija Zivkovic's pass unopposed at the end of beautiful move guided by Milinkovic-Savic and Tadic.

The match looked over but from nowhere Cameroon sprung back into life thanks to Aboubakar's odd goal.

The Al Nassr forward raced through onto Castelletto's launched pass over the top and scooped an improbable finish over the Serbia 'keeper, beaming with delight after his goal was awarded following a VAR check.

Aboubakar's pace caused Serbia all kinds of problems and he laid on Choupo-Moting's leveller, bursting down the right and laying on a simple finish for the Bayern Munich forward which sparked wild celebrations on the pitch and in the stands.

Neither side could find a winner in an end-to-end finish to the game and their bids to make the knockouts will go down to the final game.



Serbia's Aleksandar Mitrovic celebrates scoring their third goal against Cameroon yesterday. *(Reuters)*



Cameroon's forward Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting celebrates scoring his team's third goal during the Qatar 2022 World Cup Group G match against Serbia at the Al Janoub Stadium in Al Wakrah yesterday. *(AFP)*

Stats

SERBIA		CAMEROON
3		3
15	Shots	13
5	Shots on Target	8
11	Chances Created	9
3	Corners	4
5	Saves	2
59.2%	Possession	40.8%
4	Offsides	0
13	Fouls	8
2	Yellow Cards	2
0	Red Cards	0

Dropped Onana not out of Cameroon picture, says Song

Andre Onana could still play in Cameroon's final World Cup group game with Brazil despite being banished from the squad for Monday's thrilling 3-3 draw with Serbia, coach Rigobert Song said.

Inter Milan goalkeeper Onana was dropped from Cameroon's matchday squad for an unspecified disciplinary issue, with reports later circulating that the 26-year-old had been sent home before his team fought back from two goals down in an eventful Group G clash.

However Song said that Onana has not been completely dismissed from contention for the Brazil match, saying that "it depends on him" whether he will be brought back into the fold but not saying what had caused the row.

"He is an important player but what I have to do in my role is think about the group as a whole rather than just individuals," Song told reporters.

"Right now we are working with those who want to defend the our country's colours, what interests me are the players who are here.

"I've asked him to wait, we will have the opportunity to see if he can stay (at the World Cup). It also depends on him as he will also have to obey our rules. Let's see if that's possible."

Cameroon have to beat Brazil in order to progress to the knockout stages for the first time since 1990 and Song believes his team have what it takes to defeat the five-time world champions.

"We believe we can do it against Brazil," Song added.

"We didn't come to the World Cup to just make up the numbers, to take part. We think we can still have a say in the tournament even if we know Brazil are a great team." *(AFP)*



Cameroon coach Rigobert Song reacts *(REUTERS)*



Pre___view

Ecuador performances show football's global 'evolution'

Coach Alfaro says his side's strong showing was proof of a narrowing gap between traditional powerhouses and the chasing pack



Ecuador's defender Angelo Preciado (centre) controls a ball during a training session at Mesaimeer SC training facilities in Doha yesterday.

AFP
Doha

Ecuador coach Gustavo Alfaro said yesterday his side's strong showing at the World Cup was proof of a narrowing gap between football's traditional powerhouses and the chasing pack.

Ecuador sit level on points and goal difference with the Netherlands at the top of Group A and need only to avoid defeat against Senegal today to secure a last-16 place. "(I can) see an evolution — a big evolution — from the teams," Alfaro told a pre-match press conference.

"Before there was a very marked difference between the favourites and the rest, but suddenly we are seeing evenly matched games. "This is how growth works — the growth of Asian football, African football, South American football."

Ecuador cruised past hosts Qatar 2-0 in the World Cup curtain raiser, before drawing with the Netherlands 1-1 despite outplaying the European giants for much of the match.



Ecuador's Argentinian coach Gustavo Alfaro speaks at a press conference at the Qatar National Convention Centre (QNCC) in Doha yesterday.

The South Americans will top the group if they avoid defeat and better the Netherlands' result against Qatar. They have only once before reached the knockout phase, losing 1-0 in the last 16 to England in 2006 when David Beckham scored a free-kick.

"One of the strengths of Ecuador is that we were able to transform the things we need to transform," said Alfaro."We needed to grow up.

"We kept our physical skills and our natural skills, but we knew we needed to do things differently, because there are other national teams that are doing things better than us." Star striker and captain Enner Valencia, who has scored each of Ecuador's three goals in Qatar, is struggling with a knee injury but Alfaro expects him to play.

"He has a knee sprain but he has a big heart and he wants to be in every battle for our national team." Alfaro, 60, promised the team would "try and play the best World Cup in Ecuadoran history", while emphasising his side's "great future" in the game. "We respect the pecking order, but we do not need to be fearful. We are creating our own pathway."

Fact Box

ECUADOR vs SENEGAL

When: Today, 6pm
Where: Khalifa International Stadium, Al Rayyan
Capacity: 45,857

Key stats:

- Senegal must win to ensure they earn a place in the last 16, though a draw may be enough if Qatar beat the Netherlands by two goals or more.
- A draw will see Ecuador advance, while they could still go through in defeat if Qatar get a big enough win over Netherlands..
- Ecuador's last six goals at the World Cup, all scored in the 2014 and 2022 tournaments, have been netted by forward Enner Valencia. He has three in this campaign and is comfortably his country's all-time leading scorer at the global finals ahead of Agustin Delgado (3 goals).
- Ecuador are playing in their fourth World Cup with aspirations to surpass their previous best performance when they reached the last 16 in Germany in 2006.
- Senegal reached the World Cup quarter-finals on debut in 2002 but were eliminated in the group stage on fair play points in their second visit in 2018 when they finished level with Japan.
- Senegal have met South American opposition twice at the World Cup. They drew 3-3 with Uruguay in 2002 and lost 1-0 to Colombia in 2018.
- Ecuador have never faced an African nation at the finals.

Previous meetings: Ecuador and Senegal have met on one previous occasion when they played a pre-World Cup friendly in 2002. The African nation triumphed 1-0.

Opin___ion

Senegal welcome pressure of decisive Ecuador clash: Cisse

Reuters
Al Rayyan

Senegal coach Aliou Cisse said his team are expected to reach the World Cup knockout stages due to their status as African champions but his players are adapting to the pressure well.

Having reached the quarter-finals on their World Cup debut in 2002, Senegal were eliminated in the group stage on fair play points four years ago in Russia.

Senegal need to beat Ecuador in their final Group A game today to qualify for the last 16.

They could still remain in contention with a draw, provided hosts Qatar beat three-times finalists Netherlands.

"I come from a country where we don't like losing," Cisse told reporters yesterday. "We're always hungry for that win. Not going to the round of 16 would be difficult to digest.

"We're okay, we're dealing with the pressure and stress. For me, it's good stress."



Senegal players jog during a training session at Duhail Handball Sports Hall in Doha yesterday.

Cisse's side lost 2-0 to the Dutch but beat Qatar 3-1 to keep alive their hopes of advancing.

"We understand that winning will allow us to continue on the adventure and that's exactly what we intend on doing," Cisse said.

"We know in 2018 we were looking for a draw when maybe the points would play in our favour but this isn't the case tomorrow.

"We've got a very strong and experienced team, they're a well-oiled machine. We've got the right mixture of veterans and players, players who are used to these types of challenges."



Senegal coach Aliou Cisse addresses a press conference at the Main Media Centre in Doha yesterday.

Ecuador need a win or draw to qualify, after beating Qatar 2-0 and outplaying the Dutch in a 1-1 draw to go joint top of Group A.

The South Americans are sweating on the fitness of captain Enner Valencia after he was carried off late in the Netherlands draw with a recurrence of a knee strain.

The 33-year-old forward has scored all three of Ecuador's goals in Qatar, adding to the three he bagged in Brazil in 2014, and is key to their chances of reaching the knockout round for only the second time.

"I hope he won't be playing tomorrow," Cisse joked. "I don't really know (Valencia) in particular but I can see that he is a warrior and he'll want to be part of the team for a game like this.

"I think the whole Ecuadorean team is a great team, they are very aggressive and they defend well. I know that my team will be focused tomorrow."

Foc___us

FIFA lifts ban on Kenya's national body

AFP
Nairobi

FIFA has lifted a ban on Kenya's national football federation, following the government's decision to reinstate the body after disbanding it over corruption allegations, the country's sports minister said yesterday.

In February, football's world governing body suspended the Football Kenya Federation (FKF), citing government interference after the authorities shut down the organisation last year over graft allegations.

Earlier this month, Sports Minister Ababu Namwamba announced that the federation would be reinstated but warned its former chief, who is facing corruption charges, against returning to the FKF until his case was concluded.

Yesterday, Namwamba told reporters in Nairobi that he had met with FIFA officials in Qatar to review Kenya's suspension.

"I would like to express my delight for Kenya to return back to international football," he said, announcing the lifting of the ban.

"I am happy that FIFA has made it clear that certain issues of integrity, accountability and good governance in football will be sorted out and investigations into judicial matters remain alive," he added.

The atmosphere in Qatar is fantastic: Cafu

Two-time FIFA World Cup winner pleased with Brazil's start at Qatar 2022

Brazil legend Cafu is enjoying the festive atmosphere in Qatar during the first FIFA World Cup in the Middle East and Arab world.
A two-time FIFA World Cup winner and the only man to play in three consecutive finals, Cafu was full of praise for the host country.
The former Selecao captain and Qatar Legacy Ambassador is also encouraged by Brazil's start to the tournament after Tite's men defeated Serbia 2-0 in their opening match at Lusail Stadium.

How have you found the World Cup atmosphere so far in Qatar?
It's fantastic. It's a wonderful atmosphere. The atmosphere at the matches and the FIFA Fan Festival has been especially fantastic. I've been following the progress of things here for many years and it's great to see everything come together. I am sure everything will get even more exciting as the tournament continues.

What have you made of the FIFA Fan Festival?
I've been to many fan festivals over the years and I want to say congratulations to Qatar for staging such a fun event. I've been a few times already and watched some matches there. I would highly recommend it and encourage everyone to visit.

What have you made of the spirit between different sets of fans?
It's wonderful to see all the fans mingling together and enjoying each other's company. As an ambassador, this is what we have been working towards for so many years. Football brings everyone together.

What did you make of Brazil's 2-0 victory over Serbia in their first match?
It was a wonderful result. It's always great to start a World Cup with a victory. It's a positive way to begin and move forward in the competition because there will be tougher games ahead.



Brazil legend Cafu is full of praise for Qatar.

SPORT

FIFA WORLD CUP Qatar2022









Glimpses of Qatar 2022



























SPORT

FIFA WORLD CUP Qatar2022









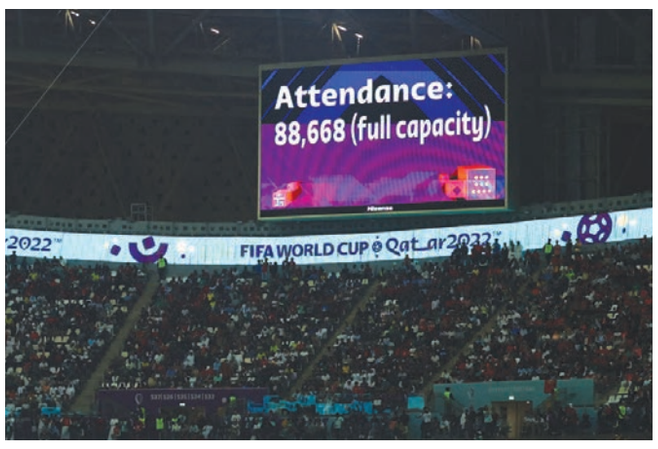






















SPORT

FIFA WORLD CUP Qatar2022

Spotlight

France's Kounde steps into shoes of veteran

Reuters
Doha

Defender **Jules Kounde** has taken on an unlikely role in the French team at the World Cup in Qatar: replacing a veteran right back benched for his poor play.

Kounde, who turned 24 this month, has stepped in for the previously well-established Benjamin Pavard in the starting line-up, after a Pavard blunder against Australia cost the defending World Cup champions a goal.

The Bayern Munich right back, a starter on the 2018 World Cup team, was subbed out by manager Didier Deschamps in the 89th minute of their 4-1 win over Australia and did not play in France's 2-1 victory against Denmark.

Pavard was at fault for squandering France's clean sheet, failing to mark Australia's Craig Goodwin at the far post and thereby allowing the Socceroos to open the scoring in the ninth minute.

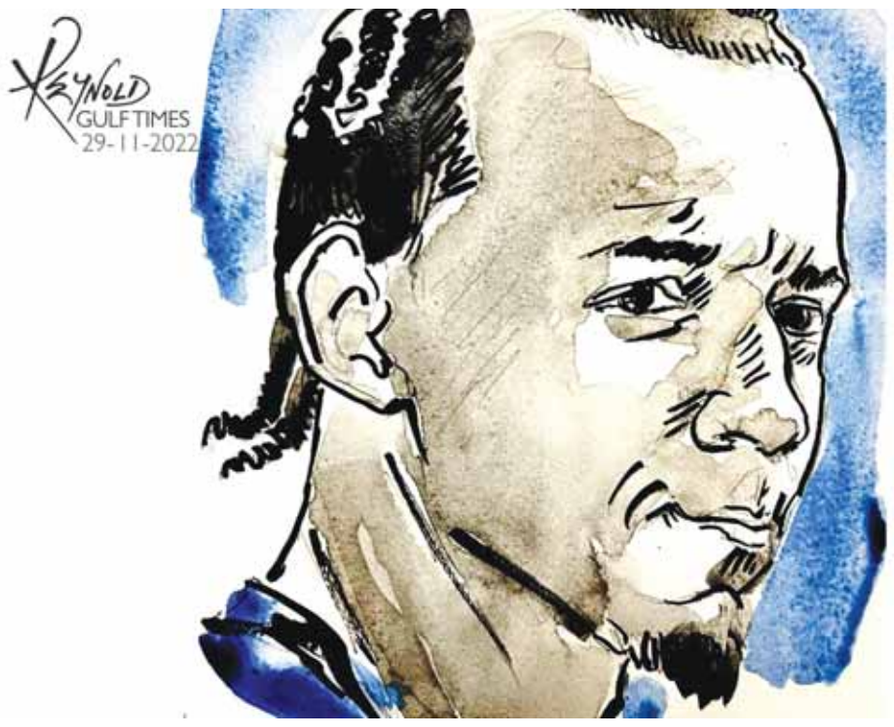
"It's an absolutely healthy competition," Kounde said yesterday of his relationship with Pavard.

"We of course talk sometimes. We are each trying to bring our best for the team when we play and then it's the coach who makes the decisions."

Kounde, who plays as a centre back at FC Barcelona, is not a natural right back but has thankfully found an ally in his club teammate Ousmane Dembele on the wing.

"Playing with Ousmane helps me," Kounde said. "We played a few matches together on the right flank. Defensively he was very impressive during the last match. I'm very happy to have his defensive support."

Beating Denmark 2-1 made France the first team in the 32-nation tournament to reach the round of 16. France, the first defending champions to reach the round of 16 since Brazil in 2006, play Tunisia in their last Group D match tomorrow and could use their substitutes to rest their star players ahead of the next stage.



Sheikh Joaan attends OCA advisory committee meeting



Qatar Olympic Committee President HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani yesterday attended the virtual meeting of the advisory committee of the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) held at the Olympic House in Lausanne, Switzerland. During the meeting, they discussed the topics in the agenda that would enhance Asian joint action in the field of sports and give impetus to the Olympic-Asian movement. **(QNA)**

Preview

USA's Berhalter calls for focus on soccer ahead of Iran decider

'It's a knockout game, both teams are desperate to go to the next round'

Reuters
Al Rayyan

United States coach Gregg Berhalter insisted his team is focused only on today's Group B showdown with Iran as he sidestepped the political fracas around the game.

In a tense and unusual news conference yesterday, Berhalter was questioned about US immigration and naval policy while US captain Tyler Adams was asked about discrimination in the States and chided by an Iranian reporter for mispronouncing the country's name.

Iran earned a famous 2-1 victory in the 1998 tournament, a game widely viewed as the mostly politically charged in World Cup history and dubbed at the time as the "mother of all football matches".

"That game just sticks in my mind and burns in my mind," Berhalter told reporters before the Group B showdown.

"I was doing commentary on Dutch television for that game. What I saw from the opening whistle is one team that really wanted to win the game and one team that didn't. Iran were really committed, really focused. And for us to have a chance tomorrow, that's going to have to be the mindset."

The US could secure a place in the knockout round with a win while Iran only need a point.

"We know exactly what Iran are going to bring, and we don't want to make the same mistakes as we did in the past," Berhalter said. "We want to learn from that and be able to put it into performance." Iran's players have been dragged into a political crisis at home, pressured by protesters seeking to challenge the legitimacy of the country's rulers to side with them publicly and condemn a deadly crackdown. The US Soccer Federation temporarily displayed Iran's national flag on social media without the emblem of the country to show "support for the women in Iran fighting for basic human rights".

Players were not consulted on the decision to alter the flag. "I can only reiterate that the players and the staff knew nothing about what was being posted. Sometimes, things are out of our control," Berhalter said. "All we can do on our behalf is apologise on behalf of the players and staff, but it's not something that we were a part of…Of course, our thoughts are with the Iran people, the players and the whole country, but our focus is on this match.

"I don't want to sound aloof or not caring by saying that, but the guys have worked really hard for the last four years. It's a knockout game, both teams are desperate to go to the next round. That's how we're looking at this match."



USA's forward Haji Wright, midfielder Brenden Aaronson, defender Joe Scally and forward Josh Sargent attend a training session at Al Gharafa SC in Doha, yesterday.

Fact Box

Iran vs USA

When: Today, 10pm **Where:** Al Thumama Stadium, Doha
Capacity: 44,400

Key stats:
- Iran were thrashed 6-2 by England in their group opener but then recovered to beat Wales 2-0.
- The US have two draws, 0-0 against England after their opening 1-1 with Wales.
- Iran have never gone past the group stage.
- The US returns to the World Cup for the first time in eight years after failing to qualify for the 2018 showcase in Russia.
- Defender DeAndre Yedlin is the only player in the US squad with any World Cup experience.
- With a spot in the knockout stages at stake, there will be added significance to a politically charged clash.
- The geopolitical rivals have met once before at a World Cup in France 1998 in what at the time was dubbed "The Mother of All Games".
- Iran's 2-1 win over the US that day was their first ever victory at a World Cup.
- Prior to the match Iran presented the US team with white roses.

Previous meetings:
The two sides have met just twice before with the US having yet to win. Iran won their first meeting 2-1 at the 1998 World Cup before drawing 1-1 in an international friendly in 2000.

Criticism

Boxer Alvarez threatens Messi over jersey 'insult'

AFP
Doha

Champion boxer Saul 'Canelo' Alvarez issued a warning to Lionel Messi after a video emerged of the star celebrating Argentina's World Cup win over Mexico with a Mexican jersey on the floor.

The video shared on social media showed Messi seemingly touch the Mexican jersey with his foot while he and his teammates jumped up and down in their changing room following Saturday's 2-0 win.

"Did you see Messi cleaning the changing room with our jersey and flag????" wrote Mexican Alvarez, a four-weight champion boxer, on Twitter.

"He had better ask God that I don't find him!!"

Alvarez's outburst elicited immediate responses from those defending Messi and claiming there was nothing unusual about a football jersey being on the floor after a match.

Argentina captain Messi had apparently swapped shirts with his Mexico counterpart Andres Guardado. Some people replied to Alvarez pointing out that the video did not show Messi cleaning anything, nor was there a Mexico flag in it.

But Alvarez doubled down, insisting Messi had nonetheless "insulted" Mexico.

Former Argentina and Manchester City striker Sergio 'Kun' Aguero weighed in on the debate, replying to Alvarez.

"Mr Canelo, don't look for excuses and problems, you probably don't know about football and what happens in the changing room," wrote Aguero on Twitter.

"The jerseys are always on the floor after a game because of the sweat."

Alvarez became embroiled in several Twitter arguments, including with journalists.

"Just as I respect Argentina, Mexico must be respected. I'm not talking about the country (Argentina) but about Messi and the stupid thing he did," said Alvarez.

Alvarez has won titles at light-middleweight, middleweight, super-middleweight and light-heavyweight. He is considered one of the greatest boxers of his generation and has lost only twice in his career, including once to American great Floyd Mayweather.

Focus

Rashford praises 'unbelievable' Ronaldo experience

England forward Marcus Rashford has said it had been an "unbelievable experience" playing alongside Cristiano Ronaldo at Manchester United and described him as one of his idols.

Ronaldo left United last week when the club said they had reached a mutual agreement with the player to terminate his contract with immediate effect.

The separation came after the five-time Ballon d'Or winner had heavily criticised United manager Erik ten Hag in a TV interview and accused the club of "betraying" him. Rashford played with Ronaldo during the 37-year-old's second stint at United, having signed for the club's academy during the Portuguese's first spell. "Listen, it's been an unbelievable experience to play with him," Rashford said, speaking in a press conference at England's World Cup base in Doha.

"He's obviously one of my idols and someone I've always looked up to," he said. "So to have the opportunity to play with him is unbelievable and I'll take that with me and it's something that I can keep with me forever." **(AFP)**

Preview

Iran's team caught in dilemma before key clash

AFP
Doha

With their country riven by unrest, Iran's football team are trapped in an impossible position at the World Cup as they head into a decisive clash with the United States.

They are criticised at home, where the security forces are battling protesters, whether they voice support for demonstrators or they stay quiet.

The Iranians have insisted since the start of the competition that they are in Qatar to "fight for the people and bring them joy". But Carlos Queiroz's team are torn between conflicting interests as the government confronts widespread demonstrations sparked by the death in custody of Mahsa Amini after she was arrested for allegedly violating the strict dress code for women.

The Norway-based Iran Human Rights group says more than 410 people have been killed in a government crackdown.

The unrest at home has put the Iranian players under intense pressure.

"You don't even imagine behind the scenes what these kids have been living in the last few days, just because they want to express themselves as footballers," Portuguese coach Queiroz said after Iran lost their first game against England 6-2.

But after beating Wales 2-0 in the second match, the team are back in contention for a place in the last 16.Having to take on Iran's political nemesis, the United States, has only intensified the spotlight going into today's match.

Before the World Cup kicked off, Iranian players earned social media plaudits for refusing to sing the national anthem or to celebrate goals after Amini's September 16 death.

But the tone changed after Queiroz and his players met President Ebrahim Raisi before flying to Qatar. "Team Melli", as the national side is known, has traditionally been a unifying force in the football-mad country. Now it is a symbol of the divisions. Shouts of "freedom" rang out from Iranians in the stadium when Iran took on England. They also shouted the name of Ali Karimi, the Bayern Munich player who has become a government critic.

But players such as Mehdi Torabi and Vahid Amiri are considered government supporters.

Before the England game, the players stayed silent during the national anthem. Against Wales, they sang half-heartedly. The government seized on the victory achieved with injury time goals.

Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, said the players had made "the Iranian nation happy". Jean-Baptiste Guegan, a French specialist on politics in sport, said the players are treading a fine line as they risk sanctions on their return from the World Cup.

"On the other hand, there are activists and people involved in the struggle, who are risking their lives in Iran and want to see them (the team) be a symbol."

The team could also face suspension by FIFA for making political gestures. "It is the players' dilemma," said Guegan.



Iran's Portuguese coach Carlos Queiroz heads a training session at Al Rayyan SC in the Al Rayyan district in Doha, yesterday.



Match Report

Kudus double for Ghana sinks South Korea 3-2 in thriller

'IT WAS EMOTIONAL, UPS AND DOWNS. AT THE END WE WERE A BIT LUCKY BUT THIS IS FOOTBALL'

AFP
Doha

Mohamed Kudus scored twice as Ghana beat South Korea 3-2 in a pulsating encounter yesterday to keep their World Cup hopes alive and leave Paulo Bento's side facing an early exit.

Mohamed Salisu opened the scoring against the run of play midway through the first half at Education City Stadium and Ajax midfielder Kudus doubled the Black Stars' lead.

But the Asian side, who looked toothless in the first half, roared back after the break, pulling level through a quickfire double from forward Cho Gue-sung either side of the hour mark.

Ghana looked shell-shocked as the Korean fans celebrated wildly but they were back in front in the 68th minute when Kudus finished calmly at the back post after his teammate Inaki Williams failed to connect with a cross from the left.

The result takes Ghana second in Group H on three points. Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal will have six points and secure qualification for the last 16 if they beat Uruguay in the later kick-off in Qatar.

South Korea have just one point, gained in their opening 0-0 draw against Uruguay.

"It was emotional, ups and downs," said Ghana coach Otto Addo, who admitted South Korea were dominant at the start of the match and gave his team huge problems after the break.

"At the end we were a bit lucky but this is football," he added. "Against Portugal we were unlucky and now we're lucky and we're really, really happy that our passionate fight got rewarded."

The Asian side, captained by Son Heung-min, were quicker to settle, forcing a succession of corners but were unable to fashion a shot on target in the entire first half.

Son looked uncomfortable in the black face mask he is wearing after having surgery for a facial injury he suffered while playing for Tottenham, constantly readjusting it.

Ghana, who lost their opener 3-2 to Portugal, struggled to gain a foothold in the game.

But the match totally changed complexion in the 24th minute when the impressive Jordan Ayew, playing down the left for Ghana, swung in a free-kick.

South Korea failed to clear and Southampton centre-back Salisu finished with his left foot, sparking wild scenes of celebration among the Ghana fans decked out in red, yellow and green.

The goal revitalised the African nation, who reached the quarter-finals in 2010, with South Korea struggling to deal with their physicality and direct approach.

Now playing with flair and confidence, Ghana poured forward and doubled their lead in the 34th minute when Kudus powered a header home after a pin-point Jordan Ayew cross from the left.

Captain Andre Ayew – the brother of Jordan – called his men into a team huddle on the pitch and the players got soaked by the sprinklers after the half-time whistle.

The Koreans at last found the net in the 58th minute when Cho headed home a cross from substitute Lee Kang-in, who had just been brought on by Bento.

And they were level just three minutes later when Cho headed home Kim Jin-su's ball from the left, sparking scenes of delirium among the Korean fans.

Ghana were rocking but they dug deep and restored their lead midway through the second half through the impressive Kudus.

South Korea came back again. Goalkeeper Lawrence Ati Zigi was forced into a scrambling save to push away a free-kick while Salisu cleared off the line.

South Korea kept up their relentless pressure during 10 minutes of added time but could not find an equaliser and a number of their players collapsed to the turf at the final whistle, contemplating a third straight exit at the group stage of a World Cup.

Bento was sent off after protesting at the end of the match that English referee Anthony Taylor had not allowed a corner to be taken. South Korea's assistant coach Sergio Costa bemoaned the "totally unfair" result.

"Not even a draw was fair," he said. "We totally deserved the win so we can be very, very proud of what we have done. The result wasn't fair. You can count on us for the next match."


Ghana's Mohamed Kudus celebrates scoring their third goal with teammates during the Qatar 2022 Group H match against South Korea at the Education City Stadium in Al Rayyan yesterday. *(Reuters)*

Match Stats

GHANA		SOUTH KOREA
7	Shots	22
3	Shots on Target	7
5	Chances Created	16
5	Corners	12
4	Saves	0
36.9%	Possession	63.1%
1	Offsides	1
9	Fouls	13
2	Yellow Cards	2
0	Red Cards	0

Previ ew

Southgate ready to ring changes for Wales clash

AFP
Doha

England manager Gareth Southgate is poised to ring the changes as his team chases victory against Wales today to ensure qualification as World Cup Group B winners.

Southgate picked the same starting line-up for last week's games against Iran and the United States, but is expected to bring in fresh faces for today's final group game against the Welsh.

A win for England at the Al Thumama Stadium in Doha will guarantee that Southgate's men finish on top of Group B heading into the last 16. England were booed off the field after their 0-0 draw with the United States last Friday after a sluggish performance that was in stark contrast to their rampant 6-2 opening win over Iran.

It has led to a growing clamour for new faces, notably Manchester City's Phil Foden, to be brought into the starting line-up, while some have even suggested captain Harry Kane could be rested as he recovers from a minor foot knock. "We've got to balance freshness with stability and that's always the decision you make when you're picking a team," Southgate told a news conference yesterday.

"We've got a chance to win the group with a positive result. There's a lot resting on the game for both teams."

England could still qualify for the knockout rounds with a draw or even a narrow loss, but Southgate had his team would be chosen with victory in mind. "We're going to pick a team that we believe can win the game," said. "That's our priority always."

Asked about Kane's fitness, he added: "He's fine in terms of the knock he has.

"He's trained well, the whole group. We've got to this point with pretty much everyone available to select from which is a great position to be in."

Although hinting that he was set to change the starting lineup, Southgate emphasised that fans were unlikely to see a repeat of England's final group game at the 2018 World Cup when they made eight changes and lost to Belgium.

"We're at a major tournament. It's not about giving caps out. We're here to try and go as far as we possibly can," he said.

Southgate meanwhile brushed off pre-tournament comments from Welsh striker Kieffer Moore, who was widely quoted as saying he "couldn't wait" to eliminate England from the tournament. "He's entitled to say whatever he wants leading into a game," Southgate said. "I'd be amazed if he didn't feel that way. "But it's pointless us focusing on what was said before the game; we've got to go on the pitch and play well."


England's coach Gareth Southgate (centre) takes part in a training session at Al Wakrah SC Stadium in Al Wakra yesterday, on the eve of the Qatar 2022 World Cup match against Wales. *(AFP)*

Fact Box

ENGLAND vs WALES

When: Today, 10pm
Where: Ahmed Bin Ali Stadium
Capacity: 45,032

Key stats:
- England have beaten Wales in their last six meetings.
- England also kept a clean sheet in five of those matches.
- Gareth Bale is the only Welsh player to score against England in the 21st century when he opened the scoring in a 2-1 loss at the 2016 Euros.
- England will progress to the knockouts with a draw while a win will seal top spot in the group.
- Wales must beat England and hope the match between the United States and Iran ends in a draw. If the other game has a winner, Wales must beat England by at least four goals.

Previous meetings:
- England and Wales have played 103 times since their first meeting in 1879.
- England have beaten Wales 68 times and lost 14 while 21 games have ended in a draw.
- The teams last played an international friendly in October 2020 which England won 3-0.

Wales must give everything to beat England, says Bale

Wales forward Gareth Bale said his team needed to give everything they had to beat England in the World Cup today, having been "devastated and heartbroken" after their defeat by Iran.

Rob Page's team fell 2-0 against Iran last Friday, while Bale netted a penalty in their opener, a 1-1 draw against the United States, leaving the team bottom of Group B on one point.

To qualify for the last 16 Wales must beat England and hope the US and Iran draw. If there is a winner in the other Group B match, Wales will need to beat England by an unlikely four goals to progress.

"At this current moment we're not in the greatest of positions, we've not had an amazing tournament," Bale told a press conference yesterday.

"The main thing is that we've stuck together as a group, like we've always done and we will fight again. We'll give everything.

"You've seen our reaction, when we conceded against Iran, how devastated we all were, lying on the floor, heartbroken.

"Everyone was upset but we'll all stick together through thick and thin, the ups and downs and we'll give everything on the pitch."

Page suggest he would start various younger players to refresh the line-up for the clash against the Three Lions.

The coach would not be drawn on whether Bale and Aaron Ramsey would start the game, but the Los Angeles FC forward said he would lead by example against England.

"The one thing I always do is give 100 percent, I was flying into tackles in the 95th minute the other day," added Bale.

"I give everything like I always do for my country. I will try and lead by example for sure and hopefully that's enough on the day, that's all I can do."

Wales coach Page said that England were "beatable" and that they owe Wales' support in Qatar a strong performance.

"We've worked so hard to get into this position, my frustration and disappointment for the players is that we've shown nowhere near the level of performance that got us to this World Cup," admitted Page.

"We've got to draw a line under the last performance and irrespective of the other result we've got to give a performance.

"This tournament has shown every team is beatable, so of course England are beatable.

"Whatever team (Gareth Southgate) puts on that pitch will be a tough challenge, they will be favourites to win the game. We want to go out now and give a good account of ourselves."

Bale, 33, has not played a lot football over the past few years, drawing criticism at former club Real Madrid for his frequent injury concerns.

Nice midfielder Ramsey, 31, is another key figure for Wales, but Page kept his cards close to his chest when asked if he and Bale would be fresh enough to start against England.

"It's a big ask to go four days later from one competitive game to another," explained Page.

"I'll pick a team to go and compete against England, with or without them, you'll have to wait until tomorrow to find out. I won't give it away.

"If they don't start, can they come on and make an impact?

"Whether they start or can last an hour, or 90 mins, they are talented players.

"We're getting a bit of criticism and rightly so, because results aren't going our way, or performances. That's the industry we're in.

"We'll put our big boy pants on and get on with it and have a team that's ready for England."

(AFP)


Wales' Gareth Bale and teammates during a training session in Doha yesterday. *(Reuters)*

SPORT

FIFA WORLD CUP Qatar2022

Match Report

Late Casemiro strike sends sloppy Brazil into last 16

Despite their struggles on the night, Brazil have made their best start to a World Cup campaign since 2002

By Sahan Bidappa
Doha

It was a relief more than joy for Brazil players, who converged behind the goal after the game, where Casemiro had struck the winner earlier. They made a little jig with the fans before disappearing into the tunnel, even as the large travelling Brazilian contingent made out of Stadium 974 to celebrate their team's qualification into the last 16 of the World Cup in Qatar.

Yesterday's 1-0 win over Switzerland was far from comfortable for Brazil, the pre-tournament favourites. The Group G match was a dull affair in the first half as five-time champions failed to find the spark in the absence of their injured captain Neymar, with Switzerland sitting deep in defence but not posing any attacking threat either.

But Casemiro's well-taken half volley – seven minutes from full time – broke Swiss' resistance, just when it looked like the Europeans would take a well-deserved point. Brazil are now unbeaten in a record 17 World Cup group games, a run going back to 1998, when they lost 2-1 to Norway. They can top the group if they draw against Cameroon on Friday. For Switzerland, they need to beat Serbia or a draw would see them through to knockouts if Cameroon lose to Brazil.

All the pre-match buzz of Neymar's importance to this Brazil side was laid bare as Tite's men struggled to carve out a meaningful chance against a well-drilled Switzerland defence. This was a match calling out for Neymar's dazzling pyrotechnics as Swiss coach Murat Yakin's defensive structure frustrated the Brazilians.

Switzerland had an eventful day even before they reached Stadium 974 from their hotel, after being involved in a minor road traffic accident. The bus carrying the players had rammed into the police escort car in slow-moving traffic, while another car travelling behind hit the bumper of the bus. The collision was a minor one and it didn't seem to affect Switzerland players when they took the field.

The last two times both teams had clashed at the World Cup, the most recent being in Russia in 2018, Switzerland had managed to hold Brazil to a draw. It looked for most of yesterday's game, this too would meander into a stalemate.

This was after Tite had called upon all his attacking talent from the bench to break the deadlock. But it was Brazil's 'invisible man' Casemiro, who showed up at the right time to carry his team to victory.

The Manchester United defensive midfielder curled a gorgeous right footer into the top of the right corner after receiving a pass from Rodrigo. The strike brushed defender Manuel Akanji's backside slightly, but even then the ball was destined to beat goalkeeper Yann Sommer, who remained unmoved.

Despite their struggles on the night, Brazil have made their best start to a World Cup campaign since 2002, the last time they won the World Cup. But against teams that offer more attacking threat in the later stage of the tournament, Brazil will need to step up if they have to end their 20-year title drought.

"Thank God we scored that goal," Casemiro said. "We were patient…it was an annoying game. The first aim was to qualify. That was really important in a group as difficult as ours. It was always going to be decided by little details but we knew we would have plenty of possession and thankfully we managed to get the goal," the 30-year-old would admit later.



Brazil's Casemiro (also right) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Switzerland during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Group G match at the Stadium 974 in Doha yesterday. *(Reuters)*

Match Stats

BRAZIL		SWITZERLAND
13	Shots	6
5	Shots on Target	0
11	Chances Created	5
8	Corners	3
0	Saves	4
54%	Possession	46%
3	Offsides	1
10	Fouls	17
1	Yellow Cards	1
0	Red Cards	0

Casemiro believes despite Neymar's absence, Brazil are a more complete team now than four years ago, when they crashed out of the World Cup in Russia in the quarter-finals. "Four years have gone by and there are new players," said the former Real Madrid star.

To be fair, Brazil had been knocking at the door in the second period with Vinicius Jr the most likely to score or create a chance. The Real Madrid forward was a constant threat in the left flank and was unfortunate not to have a goal to his name.

The 22-year-old is destined for bigger things and he showed exactly why. For the Casemiro goal, Vinicius Jr had drawn three desperate defenders onto him, which allowed half-time substitute Rodrigo to create an opening.

At the hour march, Vinicius Jr had put the ball into the net only for VAR to rule it offside after Richarlison had wandered back from an offside position.

On the other hand for Switzerland, the lack of cutting edge in front of goal sealed their fate. Switzerland had six shots in total yesterday but none of them were on target, with midfielder Djibril Sow coming closest. In fact, Brazil led by two experienced centre-halves Marquinhos and Thiago Silva gave Switzerland striker Breel Embolo barely a sniff, with goalkeeper Alisson not having to make a single save at this World Cup yet. The 11 shots from Switzerland and Serbia have all been off target or blocked.

"We are competitive against bigger teams. I think we have proven that time and time again," said Swiss coach Yakin, who left out his most creative spark Xherdan Shaqiri and replaced him with Fabian Rieder.

"We lacked a bit of courage going forward but there are a lot of good things to take from this," he added.



Spotlight

Fernandes double sends Portugal into knockouts

AFP
Doha

Bruno Fernandes scored twice to give Portugal a 2-0 victory over Uruguay yesterday and send them into the knockout stages of the World Cup alongside France and Brazil. The Manchester United midfielder scored a cross-cum-shot nine minutes into the second half and then added an injury-time penalty following a handball by Jose Maria Gimenez at the spectacular 89,000-capacity Lusail Stadium.

With Portugal already through, Uruguay must now beat Ghana in their final Group H match to stand any chance of also progressing. Both sides made three changes from their opening matches, with Portugal bringing in veteran Pepe for the injured Danilo Pereira, who suffered cracked ribs in training. Pepe became the third-oldest outfield player in World Cup history.

Portugal dominated the first half, hogging the ball and creating several chances, but without ever testing Uruguay goalkeeper Sergio Rochet. Uruguay's forwards, Edinson Cavani and Darwin Nunez were starved of the ball but the South Americans still had the best opportunity of the first period.

Rodrigo Bentancur picked the ball up in his own half and surged forwards, slipping between two defenders to find himself one-on-one with goalkeeper Diogo Costa, who spread himself well to save the midfielder's shot. Portugal captain Cristiano Ronaldo was largely anonymous in the first 45 minutes but did delight fans with a shoulder pass to pick out William Carvalho, who volleyed over.

Portugal went in front in the 54th minute as Fernandes created space for himself on the left and curled an inswinging cross into the mixer, with Ronaldo breaking the offside trap to attempt a glancing header. As the ball nestled in the goal, Ronaldo wheeled away in celebration but FIFA decided he had not touched the ball, thus denying him a ninth World Cup goal, which would have put him level with Portuguese great Eusebio.

Uruguay coach Diego Alonso threw on forwards Maxi Gomez and Luis Suarez as the South Americans belatedly began to exert some pressure, and both came close to an equaliser. Gomez's rasping drive from 20 yards came back off the post with Costa beaten, while Suarez hit the side netting from close range.

With the 90 minutes almost up, Fernandes nutmegged Gimenez, whose trailing hand diverted the ball away from the midfielder and prevented him from finding himself one-on-one with Rochet. Iranian referee Alireza Faghani awarded the spot-kick after a VAR check and Fernandes sent Rochet the wrong way after his signature hop, skip run-up. He then almost completed a hat-trick but hit the post from 20 yards.

Match Stats

PORTUGAL		URUGUAY
15	Shots	11
3	Shots on Target	3
11	Chances Created	10
6	Corners	2
3	Saves	1
60%	Possession	40%
3	Offsides	0
10	Fouls	16
3	Yellow Cards	2
0	Red Cards	0



Portugal's midfielder Bruno Fernandes (right) celebrates after scoring against Uruguay during the Qatar 2022 Group H at the Lusail Stadium. **PICTURE:** *Ram Chand*

STANDINGS GROUP STAGE

Group A

Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS
1	Netherlands	2	1	1	0	+2	4
2	Ecuador	2	1	1	0	+2	4
3	Senegal	2	1	0	1	0	3
4	Qatar	2	0	0	2	-4	0

Group B

Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS
1	England	2	1	1	0	+4	4
2	Iran	2	1	0	1	-2	3
3	United States	2	0	2	0	0	2
4	Wales	2	0	1	1	-2	1

Group C

Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS
1	Poland	2	1	1	0	2	4
2	Argentina	2	1	0	1	1	3
3	Saudi Arabia	2	1	0	1	-1	3
4	Mexico	2	0	1	1	-2	1

Group D

Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS
1	France	2	2	0	0	+4	6
2	Australia	2	1	0	1	-2	3
3	Denmark	2	0	1	1	-1	1
4	Tunisia	2	0	1	1	-1	1

Group E

Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS
1	Spain	2	1	1	0	+7	4
2	Japan	2	1	0	1	0	3
3	Costa Rica	2	1	0	1	-6	3
4	Germany	2	0	1	1	-1	1

Group F

Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS
1	Croatia	2	1	1	0	3	4
2	Morocco	2	1	1	0	2	4
3	Belgium	2	1	0	1	-1	3
4	Canada	2	0	0	2	-4	0

Group G

Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS
1	Brazil	2	2	0	0	+3	6
2	Switzerland	2	1	0	1	0	3
3	Cameroon	2	0	1	1	-1	1
4	Serbia	2	0	1	1	-2	1

Group H

Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	GD	PTS
1	Portugal	2	2	0	0	+3	6
2	Ghana	2	1	0	1	0	3
3	South Korea	2	0	1	1	-1	1
4	Uruguay	2	0	1	1	-2	1

P- Played • W- Won • D-Draw • L-Loss • GD- Goad Difference • PTS- Points